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fine passages, sometimes detachable and well nigh perfect in themselves. One is constantly coming upon keen, deeply thought out bits of philosophy, of observation, sometimes of prophecy, but they are rather overwhelmed if not wholly lost in the complex of a somewhat hectic narrative. The framework of the plot is just a little cheap for its underlying theme. Possibly an intentional concession to conventionality, but a not altogether happy one.

The book opens with a contrast between the extravagance and luxury of the very rich, the viciously idle of society (in New York) and the very poor or unfortunate. An age old theme, of course, but one ever present and ever dangerously alive. There is a further contrast in ideals between Nara Alexieff, the half Russian, half American refugee girl, who barely managed to get out of Russia alive after the revolution, and the clear headed, but not hard headed young old doctor, Claveloux, who believes in science, and certainly does not believe in the fairies. Nara says to him: "You love facts—cold, hard truth—too much to suffer any illusions," to which he retorts that "some of us must remain to form a bulwark." But she asks, "Against what?" and the question permits him to state the central themes of the book.

"He spoke for a moment passionately, his large hands clenched, resting with their backs upon the edge of the table. He said: 'Against what? Why, against this world of people, drunk with illusions. Against silly religions. Against futile nostrums of statecraft. Against spiritualism. Against the claptrap the world has reached out to take as a relief from its own responsibilities.'"

Obviously, a large order. Obviously, too, there can be no comprehensive, categorical answer to the problems thus raised, even in a novel. Nara's reply is to ask, "You do not believe in magic—the magic of life?"

That indicates the next step, which is a divergence toward Nara's way of looking at things. Her earlier story is retailed, something as Æneas recounts the story of his life to Dido—the characters being reversed, covering her trials in Russia. It is a vivid incidental glimpse of the early Bolshevik days, a complete short story in itself and tremendously effective, as a detached episode.

Then the book turns to Nara's peculiar power of healing, by a sort of laying on of hands. She at first believes wholly in it, but does not pretend to understand. Naturally, she gets into trouble with the doctor and other materialistic objectors. A fakir turns up who successfully uses a model to impersonate her and works cures that are just as good as the guaranteed article.

She comes to see that success in healing, as in many other things, depends upon the faith of the patient himself rather than upon the teacher or healer. An epidemic of infantile paralysis drags her back to work among the people, but she makes the mistake of trying to tell them the truth when they ask her for a miracle. She is mobbed, even hurt by a missile thrown at her as the crowd denounces her as a witch. Thereupon the doctor reenters, and they are duly scheduled to live happily ever after—each one having taught the other something. He tells her: "You were right. There is something that people call the heart. . . . It is close to that fact that the magic of life is found—the thing you meant when you said to me once that life was made by the sorcery of something in the soul—that the unreal became real."

It is a solution of the originally propounded problems that is more conventional, more poetized than one expects from the earlier parts of the book. Or is it simply a romantic evasion, an admission that the difficulty is insoluble?

THE COTTON BROKER. By John Owen. George H. Doran Company.

"IT is, maybe, not now but a year afterward that you remember that before the mist came there was a strange scree that looked down, its face moist and shining, dark emerald, high above you." How many readers can guess what that means? If anything, it is typical of the mannerism of a good deal of this story, which starts with portentous promise of great things—at least a whale—but dwindles to a small catch. Nevertheless, he has a story, the central idea of which might have made a very fair O. Henry tale of perhaps six thousand words.

It deals with the rise to prosperity of a "self-made" cotton broker, from office boy to market magnate. On the way up he wrongs a fellow clerk who plots revenge. Caught in a pinch of the market the hero commits the indiscretion of "duplicating"—i. e., obtaining an advance from the bank twice over on the same cotton—and his avenging clerk finds it out and demands a partnership as the price of silence. But the hero's wife persuades him instead to make open confession and thus free himself. The moral problem is crudely handled, but the naughty broker and his wife have some life in them and are really well conceived—if one takes the trouble to break through the enshrouding veil of the author's unhappy manner.

THE DOOM TRAIL. By Arthur D. Howden Smith. Brentano's.

SEVERAL years ago Mr. Smith burst into the white glare of fame, as distributed by the book review and literary supplement pages, with the simultaneous publication of the "Audacious Adventures of Miles McConaughy" and the "Real Colonel House," two able bodied incarnations of the truly extraordinary in human life. Of the two heroes Captain McConaughy is probably the more tenacious of existence; we would not willingly let him die, for he was the Real Thing in heroes. Other short stories and romances have been put forth by Mr. Smith since that day, including much political and general newspaper correspondence—always adventurous.

Now he has done it again on a larger scale than even the combined House-McConaughy complex. This time it is an ambitious performance, to which the previous excellent stories are but warming up heats for the real race. Mr. Smith has the true spell of the teller of tales. When he fixes you with his eye it is quite useless to attempt escape—even the most impatient Wedding Guest must stop and listen, and he must listen to the end.

This time it is a broadly conceived historical romance; naturally more romance than history, as it should be, but apparently very well documented. It will scarcely do as a substitute for the sober chronicles of the school books and heavy histories, but it's dollars to doughnuts that any human boy, from the age of ten or so up to a hundred, will find it more absorbing as a study than even Parkman.

The story is dated in 1724 and staged widely over the territory of the Five Nations, New York city in particular and the world in general. It naturally begins with a fight, a mere preliminary bout, in London, which is required to start the prospective hero toward America. He is a very good hero, indeed, beginning with an early training as a soldier in the forces of the Pretender, and combining many of the fine heroic qualtics of both Captain McConaughy and the (politically) late Colonel House.

It is quite impossible to follow his footsteps from London to New York and thence out upon the "Doom Trail" and elsewhere among the Indians, the French and British traders, rattlesnakes and other wild creatures of the forest primeval. The tale is a long one, running through many intricacies of plot and with a wealth of incidental excitement. The real interest centers chiefly upon the Indians, who bulk large through most of the record. Therein Mr. Smith's sense of proportion is correct. It is, as a fact, true that the Indian tribes played a larger and more decisive part in much of the early struggling for possession of the new land than the average reader is apt to infer from most histories.

Mr. Smith's Indians are highly satisfactory braves for the most part. They are somewhere in a middle ground between the Noble Red Man of Cooper and the actual unwashed modern inhabitant of a reservation. There is, of course, a good deal of the Buffalo Bill Indian about them, but they are really quite alive. One of them, whose manner is as imposing as that of the now extinct cigar store Indian, comes down from his pedestal long enough to remark in a prologue:

"Once we were a nation. Once we were strong. Once even the white man feared us. Once it was for us to say who should rule the land outside the Long House, Frenchman or Englishman. The white men were weak then. They clamored for our aid. We chose the side of the Englishman. He triumphed."

He did, and one is impelled to ejaculate—Selah!

This story goes a long way toward telling how he did it. It is a stirring narrative, fluent, rapid enough, and if somewhat superheated in spots, on the whole a rattling good yarn.

THE BACKSLIDERS. By William Lindsey. Houghton Mifflin Company.

HERE is another case of the handsome, very good and intelligent young parson—who is also a man—and the worldly, superficially naughty and beautiful young woman, who tame and educate each other. It is a well done story, but it is inconsiderately cruel of the publishers to call attention to the "Little Minister" and Barrie by way of comparison. Mr. Lindsey has humor, in the modern popular sense of that word, and, more important, he may also be called something of a humorist in the older, broader significance of the term; but he is not another Barrie. The publisher's "blurb" is often painfully unkind to the helpless author.

All the people in the story play their parts neatly and quite satisfactorily in character, although some of the minor folk, the village eccentricities, the drummer and the vicious church gossips and elders tend ever so slightly toward caricature. The Rev. John Gray, who makes a dignified arrival in the village to which he is consigned, although he bears with him a parrot in a cage, is really an engagingly human specimen, in spite of the fact that he is an orthodox Methodist and, at first, densely inexperienced. It does not take the lovely, wandering lady artist, who comes from the wickedness of the great city, very long to humanize him fully. The process is entertaining, and has some "high spots" of good melodrama.

Of course, the new parson has to reform the village. He sets the clock right, wrecks a wicked club that was cleverly named after Daniel Webster, he cures the village drunkard, reunites sundered hearts of true lovers and generally officiates as a reorganizer and uplifter. The minor plot of the village maiden who has been "led astray," and who has a very tough grained, recalcitrant father, is also judiciously managed. The book as a whole shows sound literary artisanship.

CASTLES IN THE AIR. By Baroness Orczy. George H. Doran Company.

THOSE who believe in the theory that humor is found in enjoying the misfortunes of others will find particular proofs of that axiom in this collection of episodes in the life of Hector Ratichon, which the Baroness Orczy has culled, as she avers in her graceful Foreword, from a manuscript she picked up "under the arcades of the Odeon . . . one dull post-war November morning in Paris." The Baroness Orczy makes no pretensions about her hero, who is a shabby sort of Sherlock Holmes of the 1812 period in Paris. Indeed she says he is "an unblushing liar, thief, a forger," and that all he has to recommend him is "his own unconscious humor." With such an introduction the reader may be prepared for anything from the perpetual builder of "Castles in the Air." Anything save the extraordinary stupidity of the creature. Although the clever detective never can be overdone in fiction, granting he is clever, the fact remains that he sometimes is overdone. And so it is almost a stroke of genius for the Baroness Orczy to create a character in the detective line who is always being beaten at his own game. This happens just seven times in the seven episodes in the book, although in the final phase Ratichon wins a wife and becomes a social parasite of the gentleman farmer class through his wife's fortune.

It is noteworthy that M. Charles Suarez, the polite scoundrel of the opening episode, had hit upon precisely the same device as did Poe's immortal originator of the art of deduction in "The Purloined Letter," just as Conan Doyle did in "An Adventure in Bohemia." And it worked for the ends of Suarez as it did in the other two similar scenes. It is not unnatural to think of Conan Doyle in reading this book, since Hector Ratichon must remind one, to a degree, of that splendid liar the "Brigadier Gerard." Only it is to be remarked that the unconscious humor, ascribed by the Baroness Orczy to her hero is laid on with a lighter, surer touch by Doyle in the case of his Brigadier.

THE CITY IN THE CLOUDS. By C. Ranger Gull. Hartcourt, Brace & Co.

THIS story lives up to its title and the name of its author—it "goes up in the air" dizzily and flaps around in a rarified atmosphere, sometimes well above the clouds. Even when it tries to "hit the ground" it finds an unstable, whirling earth quite unlike the globe to which humanity is accustomed. The venerably conventional plot of the elderly multimillionaire with a daughter, pursued by revenging villains but surrounded by mysteriously faithful henchmen and awaiting the rescuing hero, is staged, for the most part, upon a wonderful "dream city" built on platforms at the tops of three towers 2,000 feet or so in height. The idea is not very impressive; it is something like the crude fancies of a not very imaginative child, with no sufficient linking up to actualities to make it very plausible and no glamour of poesy sufficient to lift it into a true fairyland.

This kind of fantasia calls for a surer touch and more skill both in broad construction and in the man-

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